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INQUEST INTO HARROW COURT DEATHS



The FBU made the following comment at the end of Coroner's Inquest at Harrow Court, Stevenage, Herts

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said:

"We have heard of the extraordinary acts of courage and bravery shown by everyone at this tragic fire in Stevenage. In particular the bravery and courage shown by Mike Miller and Jeff Wornham who rescued one person but died trying to save the life of Nathalie Close.

"Everyone at this incident did the very best they possibly could with the resources, training and equipment available to them. But initially there were not enough firefighters to tackle this fire safely and none of them had specific and practical training in fighting fires in high rise blocks.

CPD

An update from the General Secretary on CPD should have arrived at all branches by now.

This includes FBU Guidance on completing the CPD application form, which members are strongly recommended to do with advice from local officials.

The information is contained in circulars also available on the FBU website: www.fbu.org.uk

"The FBU investigation concluded that Hertfordshire fire authority did not put in place what was needed to allow their fire crews to fight this fire safely. Fire crews work in difficult, challenging and potentially very dangerous situations which require the highest standards of operational training and preparation and those were lacking.

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"Selfless and courageous people act in selfless and courageous ways to save life. It is essential to avoid placing firefighters in situations where the instincts which make them firefighters push them into attempting rescues short-handed, without adequate training and without the water they needed to suppress the fire.

"The FBU investigation concluded that Hertfordshire fire authority failed to put in place proper procedures, did not have adequate training and did not send enough firefighters in the initial response to tackle this fire safely. But this tragic loss of life could have happened in any number of fire authorities across the UK, it was only by misfortune that it happened in Stevenage.

"There are three families whose lives will never be the same because of what happened at Stevenage on that night. Mike and Jeff's colleagues will also live with what happened all of their lives.

Lessons must be learned: an end to cuts to jobs, training

"The entire fire service and Government need to learn the lessons of what happened in Stevenage. There must be an end to the constant pressure to cut frontline fire crews and cut corners with training and other safety critical activities.

"In organising their response to potentially very dangerous incidents, fire authorities cannot be allowed to cut corners. Cuts cost lives and we do not intend to lose any more people in this way. We look forward to reviewing the Coroner's Rule 43 report on the incident which he has promised to send to the relevant bodies in the fire service and Government."


An executive summary of the Health & Safety investigation conducted by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) into the tragic fatalities of Firefighter Wornham and Firefighter Miller can be found on the FBU website: www.fbu.org.uk

Statement from Howard Miller, Father of Michael Miller

"First of all I thank all of Mike and Jeff's colleagues who tried in vain to save both of them that night. They did everything professional firefighters could have done in the circumstances they found themselves in and no individual or collective blame can be attached to them.

"For two years I, with the help of the FBU, have concentrated my efforts on finding out why this tragedy happened and equally because I know how it has affected mine to do all I can to ensure such pain and anguish does not happen to any other family.

"I don't believe that the tragedy had anything to do with individual errors but was directly because Herts fire and rescue service -



like so many others across the UK - have not been giving their fire crews the hands-on practical training and preparation needed to deal safely with the dangerous incidents they are sent to and to the standards that we as a society expect from them.

"Hands-on, real life, practical training cannot - as it appears to be currently - ever be replaced by CDs, DVDs or a memo pinned on a noticeboard. You simply can't do it on the cheap just to save money because in the long run, as this tragedy proves, it costs lives, both firefighters and the public at large and I do not want any family to live with what my family and I will have to live with for the rest of our lives. I do not want other mothers and fathers of the young men and women serving in the fire service to ever have to bury their children, it's a parent's worse nightmare.

"All of the lessons of this tragedy need to be learned across the country, by fire fighting forces and the [local] government's that fund them.

"I believe Mike and Jeff were badly let down by the very senior managers who ran Hertfordshire fire service on behalf of us, the public. Some within the fire authority, almost from day one have appeared to me to have made every effort to block the truth from coming out.

'Numerous, entrenched mistakes'

"So numerous and entrenched were the mistakes at a senior level in

terms of failing to plan a safe response with properly trained fire crews, that to me, combined, amount to total incompetence and at worse gross negligence.

"I fail to see why the Health and Safety Executive have not acted in Hertfordshire or other fire services across the UK.

"In particular I would like to see: what action the Health and Safety Executive will now take in terms of enforcement notices against the fire authority and the possible prosecution of the fire authority for breach of health and safety laws.

"The Government needs to urgently re-assess the strangulating effects of both the cash squeeze they have placed on fire authorities and the changes they have demanded of the fire service.

"Because I believe both of these contributed to this tragedy.

"The public has to show they value the fire service at the wide-range of emergency incidents we expect them to respond to. That will push the fire services up the political agenda and help make sure that this highly valued service gets the resources and training it deserves rather than the so-called modernisation agenda being rammed down its throat.

"I would like first of all to thank my legal team headed up by Martin Seaward QC, Thompsons solicitors and also the FBU for all the help and assistance they have given.

Appeal Court rules firefighters can't be forced to co-respond

An appeal brought by two fire authorities seeking to force firefighters to answer 999 medical emergencies on behalf of the ambulance service has been dismissed by the Court of Appeal in London today. The Fire Brigades Union welcomed the decision and were awarded their legal costs.

The legal case focused on whether firefighters could be required under their contracts of employment to participate in so-called "co-responder" calls. It follows the attempted introduction of co-responder schemes at Retford Fire Station in Nottinghamshire and Grantham Fire Station in Lincolnshire.

Fire crews at Retford had 10% of their pay cut for over a year by local managers trying to force them to attend very serious medical emergencies on behalf of the ambulance service. Local managers had never tried to reach an agreement on the changes.

In both areas fire crews are sent to the highest category of medical emergencies on behalf of the local ambulance service. The arrival of fire crews 'stops the clock' and counts in the official NHS ambulance response statistics as if a proper ambulance paramedic has arrived.

Union welcomes ruling

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack: "We welcome the ruling but are

dismayed that senior fire service managers have thrown council tax money away on legal fees and court costs.

"These two fire authorities tried to impose these schemes without agreement, with no national discussions, with no proper procedures and with no UK wide standards. Our repeated calls for dialogue and discussion at national level have been constantly ignored.

"Fire crews are not going to give away their employment rights. And they're not going to let anyone take them away either.

"Large numbers of firefighters do not even have their basic first aid certificates up to date. Fire crews know nothing of diagnosis, medical protocols or how to ensure there is no cross-infection with bugs such as MRSA.

"Against a background of cuts and increased responsibilities fire and rescue services are struggling to provide time and resources maintain our members' fire service skills never mind being forced into providing an ambulance service. Enthusiastic firefighters with basic first aid skills are not the sort of response the public expect when they dial 999 and ask for an emergency ambulance.

"NHS targets for ambulance arrival times allow the very basic first aid provided under these schemes to count as if an ambulance paramedic has arrived. There is no target for the ambulance to arrive which can mean a worse service is covered up by misleading response statistics suggesting the opposite.

Firefighter death in Ireland

The SIPTU trade union in the Republic of Ireland has informed the FBU that one of their firefighters was killed at an incident early on Sunday 25 February.

Firefighter Michael Liston of Foynes Fire Station, County Limerick Fire Service was attending an RTC when he and a local Police Officer - Brian Kelleher, were both struck and killed by another vehicle.

Michael leaves behind a widow and four children and will be buried in his home town after 1 o'clock mass on Wednesday.

RCCs: Call capacity would see rapid meltdown

Government plans to shut every 999 fire service emergency control room in England and move to only 9 regional controls by 2009 should be halted immediately, says the Union. The call comes after a Parliamentary Answer showed the number of 999 calls regional controls could handle at the busiest times would be disastrously low.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said:

"We are stunned by how few 999 emergency calls a regional control could handle in a busy period. Only one regional control

outside London could handle more than 200 calls an hour and most far less than this.

"Many single brigade controls have to handle this number on their own during busy periods in their own fire service area.

"Yet these regional controls are meant to handle the work done by up to 9 existing control rooms across vast regions.

Bordering on criminally wrong

"These figures will send a shudder down the spine of anyone who has any understanding of the real life strains being placed on the fire service. They have not just got this disastrously wrong, this is bordering on criminally wrong.

"In normal conditions handling this number of calls across a region might be just about adequate. But many times in the last year local fire controls have had to cope with higher volumes than this on their own, never mind across a region.

"These new controls are meant to be better at handling major incidents. On these figures only one major incident could swamp a regional control room in minutes.

Three major incidents would lead to the collapse of RCCs

"The fire service plans to be able to deal with three major incidents at the same time. The regional controls - on these figures - would simply collapse.

"In recent weeks severe weather has hit several regions at the same time. With only a single control for each region every one would have hit capacity quickly with no ability to take overflow calls from others.

"Regional controls might be able to deal with the desktop scenarios dreamt up by management consultants, but not with real life. Not only will they not make things better, on these figures they will be much worse when the public need them most.

"The Government is trying to run 999 emergency command and control rooms like call centres. The public don't want to be on hold listening to Vivaldi's Four Seasons as the smoke is flowing into the room.

"The Government seems determined to press ahead with these plans. For the sake of firefighters and the public they must stop now and re-assess, because these figures show it will not work."

Lobby Your MP

Early Day Motion 805 calls for a full independent assessment of the Final Business Case of the Firecontrol project to be carried out before any further major decisions are made. A letter which you can easily send to your local MP, and which you can amend, is available at the following link:

www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/political/epetition.php

91 MPs from all three major parties had signed the EDM as of today - click on the following link (or cut and paste/type into your internet browser) to find out if your MP is among them:

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=32502&SESSION=885>

North Yorks: cuts to AFA response under fire

North Yorkshire fire crews have raised concerns about the introduction of a new policy which would limit the fire service response to automatic fire alarms. The biggest reduction in fire service response is proposed to automatic fire alarms in business and commercial premises.

In North Yorkshire most automatic fire alarms - although with 'good intent' - turn out to be wrong. But every year, a significant number turn out to be genuine alarms to real fires and it is these which concern fire crews.

Under the new policy many of these automatic alarms would be checked out by non-fire service personnel who are designated the "responsible person" for a particular premises. These individuals can be based many, many miles from the site yet be sent to inspect a premises in the middle of the night, having been woken from their sleep.

These individuals would be asked to enter and inspect the premises where an automatic fire alarm has been triggered to see if there was a fire. This is contrary to longstanding and current advice to get out, stay out and call the fire

service out.

For many business and commercial buildings there would also be a delayed and reduced response from the fire service. Fire crews are also concerned that there has not been proper consultation with businesses or property insurers over the move to take effect from 1 April.

Ian Watkins North Yorkshire FBU Brigade Secretary said: "There is clearly a risk in sending anyone into a building where a fire alarm has been activated. That's why fire service personnel turn up in numbers with protective equipment.

Irresponsible

"It is irresponsible to put pressure on anyone to enter premises with an activated fire alarm on their own, at night and quite possibly with limited communications. The reason it is our current advice to get out, stay out and call the fire service out is because it is dangerous to do otherwise.

"A backdraft could seriously injure or kill someone or they could be quickly overcome by smoke before they could confirm the alarm was genuine. A visual inspection of a premises is not going to tell anyone if there is a fire unless it is obvious. The fire service on the other hand has specialised equipment to detect fires including those which are difficult to find.

"Providing a delayed and reduced fire service response is wrong. In those cases where there is a fire it will have had much longer to

develop and will cause more damage as a result.

"The fire service would save money but there is a very high likelihood of greater damage to businesses and commercial premises as a result. Many businesses and workplaces which suffer fire damage never recover.


"We are here to save lives. We also have a duty to save livelihoods and limit fire damage to homes, businesses and commercial premises and this policy potentially breaks that duty."

"We believe the deaths of firefighters Jeff Wornham and Michael Miller were avoidable. Firefighters regularly work in difficult, challenging and potentially very dangerous situations.

"That is precisely why it is essential that we do our work with the highest standards of training and to the very highest levels of health and safety. The FBU is keen to ensure that lessons are learned from this tragedy and that the issues raised are acted upon by fire services across the UK."

Warwickshire fire crews raise concerns about fire cover review

Warwickshire fire crews are concerned by news that a review is to take place into fire and rescue service provision in Warwickshire. The decision was made at Warwickshire county council budget meeting on 6th February 2007 which



decided on an urgent "independent" review.

Local fire crews have demanded the county council come clean about what the review will be considering, particularly since the decision was taken at a budget meeting. This review would report back in July 2007, after the May elections.

While the "review" would not impact on the budget for the coming year it is timed to report in advance of setting the budget for 2008/09.

The fire service in Warwickshire is already a very cost efficient service with only 26 fire engines and 440 firefighters providing cover 24 hours a day, 365 days a year in an area of 763 square miles with a population of 533,900. National statistics show Warwickshire's housing population is growing at a faster rate than in the West Midlands suggesting there should be an increase in the service rather than a cut.

Councillors have to come clean

Tom Conn, Warwickshire FBU secretary said: "The councillors have to come clean about what this review is looking at and who is carrying it out. The fact that the decision was made at a budget meeting raises concerns that it could be driven by cost-cutting rather than anything else.

"The service we provide is now an all-round rescue service, not only fires, including being the key response to any major terrorist

incident in the region or nationally. Any element of our service would not be improved if cuts meant it took longer for appliances to arrive in sufficient numbers to properly deal with emergency incidents.

"We support any moves which help save lives, limit damage to homes, businesses and heritage sites and improve our response to all the emergencies we attend. Warwickshire fire crews would oppose any moves that cut the vital 999 emergency service that we know is so important."

Tony McGuirk on a new high


Tony McGuirk, Merseyside chief fire officer, has been awarded a 15% pay rise, taking his salary up to £167,000, nearly £30,000 more than the region's chief constable, who leads more than four times as many officers.

Prior to the meeting Merseyside fire authority said it has to retain the service's highest ranking executives, who it says are the best in the country. It insisted a pay review for its management team is saving money for the taxpayers.

Cllr Eddie Clein, co-leader of the Authority, said the pay rises will help retain its chief officers.

Best chief fire officer!

He said: "Merseyside is credited with being the best fire service in the country, therefore we have the



best executive team. It's not rocket science to consider that we also have the best chief fire officer. The service will be far more stable if it could retain its leaders.

"They have led the modernisation of this fire service, which has saved the taxpayers money while continuing to provide the best service in the country."

The decision was made by the fire authority last week at a meeting where other senior managers were also handsomely rewarded.

Scandalous

Secretary of the Merseyside Fire Brigade Union branch (FBU) Les Skarratts said: "It's absolutely scandalous when firefighters' pay increases are being restricted to 2%.

"Anything over that for them would be met by more 'efficiencies', which means job losses.

"A mark of a successful executive team is good industrial relations and this year Merseyside has seen the longest fire strike in decades. We would question whether the senior officers deserve such a pay rise."

The pay review has been recommended to the Fire Authority after an independent report was carried out by consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers.

McGuirk is now the highest paid chief fire officer in the country

apart from the chief of London Fire Brigade, who is paid £198,000.

Local reports say that Mr McGuirk is favourite to take the London CFO post later this year.

It seems that the applicants from London are not up to the towering heights of Tony and that they may as well not bother applying!


B&EMM statement on firefighter John James

The B&EMM National Committee have issued the following statement:

"We are pleased that our member John James has finally reached an agreement with the West Midlands police service. John has been fully vindicated in his campaign to redress the racist actions of a police constable/service during his wrongful arrest and imprisonment in June 2004. These actions also led to a period of hospitalisation for the injuries he sustained.

John has endured a traumatic and stressful time during this period and deserves a full inquiry into the actions of the West Midlands police service and the CPS that led to the charges against him and his subsequent acquittal.

John is a responsible member of the fire service in Gloucester and his treatment at the hands of another public service was disgraceful. The lack of support he received from Gloucester Fire and Rescue service was also regrettable and the reasons for that also need to be examined. We hope that John can now



continue his life and career in a positive and productive manner.

Click on the below link for a report on the case in the local press:

<http://www.expressandstar.co.uk/2007/02/12/fireman-gets-police-payout/>

Health study of TETRA masts

Researchers from the University of Essex are to carry out a two-year study to establish if there are any short-term health effects from exposure to TETRA (Terrestrial Trunked Radio) mobile radio masts. The study follows the recent completion of the largest ever scientific study of the health effects of conventional and 3G mobile phone masts, carried out at the University's specially-designed Electromagnetics and Health Laboratory. Results of this study, which tested 176 people under carefully-controlled conditions, are now being analysed and are due to be published later this year.

The research team has been awarded £265,624 by the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research programme - which is supported by government and industry - to enable them to examine the effect of the electromagnetic fields emitted by the TETRA system on up to 264 volunteers. TETRA is the mobile communications system used by the emergency services, and the research team hopes to recruit participants from these services.

The study aims to test equal numbers of control participants and those who appear particularly

sensitive to the technology. Led by the Department of Psychology, the multi-disciplinary team includes researchers from the Departments of Computer Science and Electronic Systems Engineering, and a medical doctor.

The studies, say the researchers, will help to provide conclusive evidence about whether these technologies have a direct effect on health and well-being.' After completion of the second study, the results of both studies will be combined to analyse the effects of an active versus non-active signal on a larger sample size. *Volunteers are needed. Please contact ehstudy@essex.ac.uk or telephone 01206 873784. Volunteers will need to attend the University three times, and will receive travel expenses and a small payment for participating.*

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill

The TUC has now finalised and published the content of the Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill. John McDonnell MP was drawn sufficiently high in the recent Private Members' ballot to be able to publish the Bill in Parliament, and on Thursday 1 March John McDonnell published the Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill. The second reading will be 19 October.

If enacted the Bill would significantly strengthen trade union rights, including:

- Better protection for striking workers

- Simpler and fairer industrial action balloting and notice procedures
- Reform of the use of injunctions by employers
- Allowing solidarity action in certain circumstances
- Prevention of the use of replacement labour during strikes
- Trade-union rights for prison officers.

More info:

www.unitedcampaign.org.uk

Government must act over Hilton ban on Cubans

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC) has issued an urgent call to the UK government to take action to ensure that the Hilton Hotel Group comply fully with UK law after it declared that Cuban nationals would be barred from staying in its hotels due to the application of US laws against Cuba. CSC has welcomed any efforts to apply pressure on the Hilton Group to change their policy which bans Cuban Nationals from staying in their hotels in Britain. This application of extra-territorial aspects of the illegal US blockade against Cuba is discriminatory, racist and unlawful under the Race Relations Act of 1976, says CSC.

The Parliamentary Scottish Affairs Committee as well as other groups and organisations have declared that they will not be using Hilton hotels until this policy is reversed. A T&G spokesman described the ban on Cuban delegates as an "outrageous act of discrimination...

Hilton can kiss goodbye to trade union business if this is their attitude," he said. The T&G will not be using Hilton hotels for their biennial conference later this year. And the Scottish TUC, which held its sixth annual learning conference at the Dundee Hilton last year, confirmed that it will be backing the boycott.

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has written to the Hilton in London, reminding it that its actions would be illegal. A CRE spokesperson stated: "The Hilton would be acting unlawfully under the Race Relations Act by refusing to provide services to Cuban people. The Race Relations Act makes it unlawful to discriminate on racial grounds, which includes nationality, in the provision of goods, facilities or services."

The US has applied its blockade against Cuba for 47 years.

Lobby Your MP

FBU members and officials can exert pressure on the Government by urging their MP to sign Early Day Motion 828 (HILTON HOTEL GROUP), tabled by Ian Gibson MP.

For the text of the EDM and who has signed, click the following link:

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=32529&SESSION=885>

For more from CSC:

www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/

To receive the e-bulletin and other news from the FBU direct into your email inbox go to www.fbu.org.uk and subscribe.